

Message Text

SECRET

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S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 SEOUL 9748

NODIS/CHEROKEE

DEPT PASS SECDEF AND CHAIRMAN JCS

PERSONAL FROM AMBASSADOR SNEIDER AND GENERAL VESSEY

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, KS, US
SUBJ: IMPLICATIONS OF CURRENT DIFFICULTIES IN US-KOREAN RELATIONS

1. GENERAL VESSEY AND I HAVE CONCLUDED THAT WE MUST SHARE WITH YOU OUR FOREBODINGS REGARDING THE CONTINUED EROSION IN US RELATIONS WITH THE ROKG AND OUR GROWING CONCERNS REGARDING THE RESULTANT INCREASED RISK OF A SERIOUS INCIDENT INSTIGATED BY THE NORTH KOREANS.

2. WE HAVE NO WISH TO APPEAR OVER-ALARMIST NOR DO WE HAVE ANY INTELLIGENCE NORTH KOREANS ARE PLANNING TO INSTIGATE INCIDENT. ON THE OTHER HAND, WE BOTH REMAIN ACUTELY CONSCIOUS OF THE INHERENT HOSTILITY ALONG THE NORTH-SOUTH BORDER AND ADJACENT WATERS, THE CONSTANT POTENTIAL FOR EVEN ACCIDENTAL INCIDENTS, AND THE NORTH'S CAPABILITY AND PAST PROCLIVITY TO INSTIGATE WITH ABSOLUTELY NO WARNING INCIDENTS POTENTIALLY COSTLY AGAINST EITHER OR BOTH US AND KOREAN FORCES. SUCH NORTH KOREAN INITIATIVES ARE NOW DETERRED LARGELY BY FEAR OF US RETALIATORY POWER, AND OUR STRONG AND QUICK REACTTON TO THE 1976 PANMUNJOM INCIDENT SEINFORCED THESE

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FEARS. WHAT CONCERNS US NOW IS THAT THE APPARENT CURRENT DISARRAY IN US-ROK RELATIONS MAY LEAD THE NORTH ONCE AGAIN TO MISCALCULATE OUR READINESS TO EMPLOY US RETALIATORY POWER AND THE NORTH MAY BE TEMPTED TO TEST OUR STEADFASTNESS THROUGH EITHER DIRECT ATTACKS OF US FORCES OR MOVES AGAINST ROK UNITS. THE NORTH IN EFFECT WOULD CALCULATE IF THEY COULD DRIVE A FURTHER WEDGE BETWEEN THE US AND THE ROK

BECAUSE THE EROSION OF SUPPORT FOR KOREA IN THE US WOULD
HANDCUFF THE US REACTION.

3. WE ARE CONCERNED THAT THROUGH A PROTRACTED PERIOD OF
PUBLIC QUARRELS WITH ROKG OVER ISSUES SUCH AS TONGSUN PARK
CASE AND HUMAN RIGHTS WE WILL CREATE THE IMPRESSION IN BOTH
HALVES OF KOREA AND ELSEWHERE IN ASIA THAT OUR RELATIONS
WITH ROK HAVE ERODED TO THE POINT WHERE US ACTION TO MEET
A THREAT FROM THE NORTH IS NO LONGER AS CERTAIN AS IN THE
PAST. KOREANS HAVE A LONG HISTORY OF DEPENDENCE ON OUTSIDE
POWERS, AND THEY ARE KEENLY ALERT FOR ANY SIGNALS, REAL OR
IMAGINED, INDICATING A SHIFT IN THE WIND, AS DEMONSTRATED BY
ROK REACTIOH TO THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF NIXON DOCTRINE, THE
WITHDRAWAL OF THE SEVENTH DIVISION, THE FALL OF VIETNAM, AND
ANNOUNCEMENT OF SECOND DIVISION WITHDRAWAL. THE NORTH
KOREAN BUILD-UP SINCE THE EARLY SEVENTIES CAN BE VIEWED AS
AN ATTEMPT TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THIS TREND. WE MUST RECOGNIZE
THAT NORTH KOREAN HOPES RISE WITH NEWT OF ROK-US QUARRELS
OVER TONGSUN PARK, CONGRESSIONAL RELUCTANCE TO CONSIDER THE
COMPENSATORY PACKAGE, AND THE CONTINUING FLOOD OF US NEWS-
PAPER ARTICLES CRITICAL OF THE ROK. THAT THE NORTH CAN BE
GROSSLY MISCALCULATING OUR REACTION IS NO COMFORT, GIVEN
THEIR PAST RECORD OF RISK-TAKING VENTURES.

4. A SECONDARY CONCERN RELATES TO THE CURRENT ROK MOOD AND
IN PARTICULAR THE SENSE OF ISOLATION PERVADING IN KEY CIRCLES
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HERE. THE FEAR IS
THAT THE CURRENT EROSION IN RELATIONS WITH
US, ON TOP OF UNDERLYING CONCERNS ABOUT US GROUND FORCES
WITHDRAWAL, NOT OLY BREEDS OVER-INFLATED ROK DREAMS OF SELF-
RELIANCE BUT ALSO A COMPULSION TO SHOW AN ABILITY OR DETER-
MINATION TO GO IT ALONE WHICH BREEDS A GREATER TEMPTATION
TO REACT UNILATERALLY TO NORTH KOREAN PROVOCATION.
THE RISK OF ESCLATION FROM A NORTH KOREAN INSPIRED INCIDENT
THUS RISES. GENERAL VESSEY, WITH MY FULL SUPPORT, IS MAKING
EVERY EFFORT TO MINIMIZE THIS POTENTIAL, BUT IT IS
INHERENT IN THIS KIND OF SITUATION. THE LONGER THE EROSION
IN US-ROK RELATIONS IS ALLOWED TO CONTINUE, THE GREATER
WILL BE THE RISK OF BOTH NORTH KOREAN MISCALCULATION AND
SOUTH KOREAN OVERREACTION.

5. WE RECOGNIZE, AT THE SAME TIME, THAT REVERSING THE
CURRENT COURSE OF RELATIONS WITH KOREA POSES MAJOR DIF-
FICULTIES, IS A TWO-WAY STREET, AND WILL TAKE TIME. WE
KNOW THAT THE STRENGTH OF US AND CONGRESSIONAL PUBLIC
AVERSION TO KOREA LIMITS THE SCOPE OF OPTIONS OPEN TO
US RIGHT NOW AND THAT WE NEED HELPFUL STEPS QUICKLY FROM
THE KOREAN GOVERNMENT TO REVERSE THE DETERIORATION. WE

HAVE THEREFORE COMMENCED A SERIES OF VERY PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS WITH KEY KOREAN LEADERS, URGING IMMEDIATE STEPS PARTICULARLY ON THE TONG-SUN PARK CASE, APPEALING TO SHARED CONCERNS ABOUT THE OVERALL SECURITY SITUATION IN KOREA AND THE INCREASED DANGERS OF NORTH KOREAN MIS-CALCULATIONS AS SET FORTH ABOVE. I SHALL ALSO CONTINUE MY EFFORTS ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS ISSRE, ALTHOUGH IN PART PROGRESS IN THIS AREA DEPENDS UPON THE WILLINGNESS OF THE OPPOSITION TO INITIALLY ACCEPT LESS THAN A FULL LOAF.

6. WE MUST ALSO BE MINDFUL OF THE CONSIDERABLE DEBATE NOW UNDERWAY IN ROK CIRCLES. I CANNOT RECALL A COMPARABLE PERIOD DURING WHICH SO MANY MAJOR ISSUES OF BOTH INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC IMPORTANCE WERE DEBATED. TO
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THIS, WE HAVE TO ADD THE CONCERN OF ROKG AND POLITICIANS FOR NEXT YEAR'S ELECTIONS. IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE THROUGH INADVERTANCE NOT TILT THE DELIBERATIONS AND SUBSEQUENT DECISION IN DIRECTIONS INIMICABLE TO OUR

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PAGE 01 SEOUL 09748 02 OF 02 171658Z
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S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 SEOUL 9748

NODIS/CHEROKEE

DEPT PASS SECDEF AND CHAIRMAN JCS

PERSONAL FROM AMBASSADOR SNEIDER AND GENERAL VESSEY

INTERESTS. OVERT PRESSURES--AS AGAINST PRIVATE PERSUASION--ON CRITICAL ISSUES COULD AT THIS JUNCTURE WORK

VERY MUCH AGAINST OUR OBJECTIVES.

7. WHILE ACCEPTING THAT THERE ARE LIMITS IN YOUR CAPABILITIES FOR DEFLECTING OR SOFTENING THE CURRENT EROSION IN US ATTITUDES TOWARD KOREA IN THE ABSENCE OF ROK STEPS, WE URGE A VERY CAREFUL REVIEW OF ALL POLICY DECISIONS RELATING TO KOREA SO THAT THEY DO NOT UNNECESSARILY CONTRIBUTE TO THIS EROSION. VERY FRANKLY, WE HAVE BEEN FACED IN RECENT WEEKS WITH ALMOST A DAILY DOSE OF "BAD NEWS" FROM WASHINGTON, WHETHER IT BE RELATED TO SUCH ISSUES AS INCONSEQUENTIAL ADB LOANS TO KOREA OR THE PROSPECTS OF FUTURE FMS CREDITS TO KOREA. WE COULD ENUMERATE THESE BUT THE POLICY OFFICERS INVOLVED ARE OBVIOUSLY AWARE OF THEM. EACH OF THESE DECISIONS MAY APPEAR TO MAKE SENSE WHEN TAKEN IN ISOLATION BUT, IF VIEWED IN THE CONTEXT OF OUR OVERALL RELATIONSHIP, THEY MAKE FAR LESS SENSE. FROM OUR PERSPECTIVE, IT APPEARS THAT THESE DECISIONS ARE TAKEN IN COMPARTMENTALIZED FASHION WITHOUT REGARD TO PRIORITIES AND WITH LITTLE EFFORT

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MADE TO TOTE UP THEIR NET IMPACT ON OUR POSITION AND INTERESTS IN KOREA AND THE RISKS THEY COMBINE TO CREATE VIS-A-VIS NORTH KOREA.

8. FIRST AS A STARTER, WE WOULD URGE THREE STEPS, NAMELY, THAT ANY PUNITIVE ACTIONS ON HUMAN RIGHTS GROUNDS AGAINST INTERNATIONAL LOANS TO KOREA BE DEFERRED (SEE SEOUL 9736), AND SECOND, THAT THE DECISIONS RELATING TO FUTURE CONGRESSIONAL ISSUES WHICH NOW ASSUME NEGATIVE CONGRESSIONAL REACTIONS LIKEWISE BE DEFERRED. FINALLY, WE SHOULD GIVE FIRST PRIORITY AT THIS MOMENT TO RESOLVING THE TONG-SUN PARK AFFAIR. IF WE CAN RESOLVE THIS ISSUE, OTHER MATTERS, DEFERRED, CAN BE DEALT WITH MORE EFFECTIVELY. I WILL CONTINUE MY EVERY EFFORT TO SECURE THE FULL GUARANTEE SOUGHT BY JUSTICE ON TONG-SUN PARK'S WILLINGNESS TO TESTIFY IN US COURT TRIALS, BUT I THINK WE MUST FACE THE POSSIBILITY OF ASSURANCES THAT ARE SOMEWHAT LESS IRONCLAD.

9. IN THE LONGER TERM, FAR MORE ESSENTIAL ARE TWO BROADER STEPS. FIRST, AS A BEGINNING WE URGE THAT ALL DECISIONS PERTAINING TO KOREA BE COORDINATED AND REACHED IN THE CONTEXT OF OUR TOTAL POLICY TOWARDS KOREA RATHER THAN THE DISPARATE INTERESTS OF SEPARATE DEPARTMENTS, AGENCIES, ETC. SECOND, HAVING NOW DECIDED TO MOVE AHEAD WITH AN ORDERLY GROUND FORCE WITHDRAWAL AND REACHED AN UNDERSTANDING ON ITS IMPLEMENTATION WITH THE ROKG, WE GIVE CONSIDERATION TO OVERALL US POLICY TOWARDS KOREA OVER THE NEXT DECADE, SHAPING OUR ACTIONS AND PROGRAMS

TOWARD THE RELATIONSHIP WE SEEK WITH KOREA IN THE '80'S.

10. GENERAL VESSEY AND I ARE PREPARED TO CONTRIBUTE
OUR VIEWS TO THE CONSIDERATION OF BOTH CURRENT AND
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LONGER TERM PROBLEMS WE FACE IN KOREA AND SHOULD YOU
FEEL IT ADVISABLE TO RETURN TO WASHINGTON TO CONFER
WITH YOU ON THESE PROBLEMS.
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